

From the same people who tried to bring you the Eugene City Income Tax....

## The Eugene Airport Expansion Bond

by Kevin Collins

The following is a guest editorial by free-lance writer Kevin Collins who has been researching the Airport Expansion issue for over half a year.

On March 31, the property owners of Eugene are being asked to write the City Council a blank check. Beyond the rhetoric, the Airport Expansion Bond Measure is a property tax levy, merely the latest attempt to place a burden which benefits the few squarely on the backs of the many.

The City's last attempt to raise taxes was the Eugene City Income Tax/Eugene Agenda proposal. The City Council placed this measure on the ballot after they claimed that a series of town meetings showed that "the people of Eugene were in favor of" financially supporting this measure. The 80 percent margin of defeat exhibited how woefully insensitive or out of touch the Council was with the desires of their constituents. Undaunted, the Council sought alternate plan B and C and D. . . .

The Airport Committee of the City Council then seriously explored the possibility of simply funding the city's \$5.83 million share of the expansion out of the general budget. With more overviews than the Wright brothers would have imagined possible, this just wouldn't fly. Why? Because, where would the money come from? There is a city-estimated \$1.5-2.5 million projected operating deficit for the coming fiscal year. City services have been shrinking perceptibly every year. Police and fire cuts, deteriorating and unmaintained parks, fewer library hours—services which virtually every citizen uses on a regular basis—have been quickly eroding Eugene's vaunted quality of life.

### Increased Operating Budget

And now—with no Saturn plant, super collider or even Van Duyn Chocolate Company—comes the Airport Expansion "general obliga-

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tion" Bond Measure. Amid much fanfare, the Council announced and "officially" adopted a resolution that they will "try" to fund this Measure, to the tune of \$600,000 a year (principal and interest) for the next 20 years, out of "existing revenues." This plan makes no allowance for an "estimated" \$650,000 plus in additional airport operating costs yearly. Remember the Hult Center.

Airport manager Bob Shelby goes on record with the assurance that the airlines will "automatically pick this up" per working arrangements with the airport. Mr. Shelby has done an admirable job of running the current airport facility in the black for several years. However, there is nothing on paper that can be produced to pencil this out. Councilman Rutan of the Airport Committee also assures us the airlines will pay these costs. However, Shawn Boles of the Eugene City Budget Committee states that he has requested this information from Mr. Rutan on a number of occasions but that "I keep getting put off, being told it's being processed or whatever."

When the Council announced the airport bond they did not announce that they had won \$6 million in the mega bucks game! They could not, or would not, say specifically, generally, or any other way, what these "existing revenues" were. Instead, the Ballot Measure states merely, "Shall the City be authorized to issue general obligation bonds for airport improvements in an

amount not to exceed \$5.83 million?" On the ballot we will see in the voting booth on March 31, there is no mention of the fact that approval of the Bond Measure gives the Council the right to levy an additional property tax.

### Pamphlet Buries Property Tax Information

The City used public money to print a five-page pamphlet to describe the measure. The mention of the Council's right to raise property taxes is on page five, the very last sentence before the actual wording of the measure. This is, to some extent, buried in the copy. On page two, double spaced and highlighted with bright blue "key point" dots are descriptions of four improvements that the measure will not even fund but which are "proposed, and would be privately funded." When? By whom?

Why is the mention of the property tax levy buried on page five? Attorney Tim Sercombe of the City Counsel office helped approve and defends the wording and presentation of the advertisements and ballot measure. He also contends, "It is common knowledge that a general obligation bond gives the governing body the power to raise property taxes to pay it back." However, in a random survey of Eugene property owners, 80 percent did not know that this was the case. Thus, if these 80 percent went into the ballot booth without hunting up this information, they would not know that they were giv-

ing their approval for the Council to put their hands into the pockets of property owners.

Members of the Coalition Against Taxes call it "deceptive"; City Budget Committee person Shawn Boles calls it "convoluted." Whether an intentional deception or an accidental blurring of the facts, it appears that the citizens of Eugene have received less than full disclosure. A sensible alternative might be for the Mayor or City Council to fully utilize the media and other means to reach every citizen and state, "We plan to use the funds from X, Y and Z to fund this project. If that is insufficient, we will have to raise your property taxes. That is what you are voting on."

Councilman Roger Rutan is one of the chief proponents of the Expansion Bond and is also head of Oregon Venture Capital. As such, he is presumably approached regularly for funds and capital. Were an individual to approach him about a project with this type of repayment scenario, one can conjecture about how quickly and forcefully the individual might be directed to the gate.

### Effect on Other City Services

Many opponents of the Bond Measure reject it because of contentions that it would drain city services that are already shrinking. KMTR recently ran a segment featuring Richard Greene who is the owner of Rainbow Optics in Eugene. Mr. Greene cited recent cutbacks in library hours as solid evidence that the City could not afford this massive airport expansion without further and severe cutbacks to city services.

KMTR's Carol Donnegan reported the story and ended it by adding, "City officials reply that library closures and the airport expansion are not related." Since both would be paid for out of the general fund, this is a peculiar statement. It is hardly surprising that no "city official" would put his or her name to this claim. At-

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